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HOW TO

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PRESERVE HEALTH

ON THE

GOLD COAST,

WITH

REMINISCENCES OF THE CLIMATE

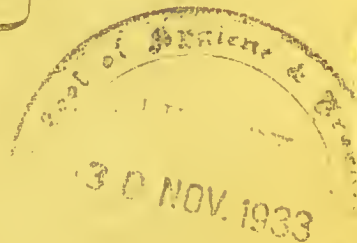
AND COUNTRY AS WELL,

BY

HENRY MACCORMAC, M.D.

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PATERNOSTER ROW,
1874.



BY DR. MACCORMAC.

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On the Nature and Treatment of Asiatic Cholera.
2nd Edition.

TO THE MEMORY OF

JOHN MAC CORMAC,

LATE OF SIERRALEONE,

ONE OF THE BEST OF BROTHERS

AND OF MEN,

THE AUTHOR.

BELFAST. 15th December, 1873

This life and the unseen life are not so much two lives as one life, in spirit as in essence at least the same, and solidary of each other.

HOW TO
PRESERVE HEALTH
ON THE
GOLD COAST,

WITH
REMINISCENCES OF THE CLIMATE AND COUNTRY
AS WELL.

I.

I WAS at one period of my life, during the greater portion of a year, in West Africa, and had a taste of its climate. Very young and very inexperienced was I at the time, and I suffered a good deal from indisposition, having had several turns of the fever of the place. Therefore it is that I should like to offer a hint or two to those who may be engaged in the approaching Expedition, and others, as to what they ought to do and ought not to do in Africa. They ought not to walk about without an umbrella in the great heats of the day or climb the mountains, as I did, at noonday and on foot. They ought to go out, indeed, as little as possible during the great heats. Wettings, and the tropical rains wet thoroughly, are very inexpedient and in fact dangerous. I was repeatedly out all night, skirting the mangroves and immersed in the heavy mists and drenching dews, on the great river that runs into the sea at or nigh Sierraleone. I was also oftener than once upon it by day. I explored the mangrove swamps, and I made various expeditions into the woods. I only mention these things in order that, so far as may be, they should be avoided. Of course the exigencies of service must entail more or less inevitable exposure but, under almost every circumstance, there will be more or less choice of alternatives, and much scope for prudence and caution as well.

The fulness of habit which Europeans, and particularly young men, often bring with them to the tropics I look upon as highly prejudicial. I am no advocate for starvation, or for total abstinence either, but if those who visit regions so very different in certain respects from our own, were to practise greater circumspection, and limit their food and drink supplies to what was strictly necessary, it would save many lives. Constipation of the intestines is apt to afflict newcomers in Africa. This is to be avoided, or the consequences may prove prejudicial. Slight casual diarrhoea is readily checked by dilute sulphuric acid. Vessels approaching the coast of Africa should be provided with awnings. Sailors, when it can be avoided, should not be suffered to go on shore, else drunkenness and fever are pretty certain to ensue. The troops and civilians engaged should, for many reasons and as quickly as possible, in fact at once on landing, be removed up from the coast. The early morning, but not too early, *and only after a light warm meal*, is the best time for locomotion. Morning-tide is infinitely better than midday, and very much better than the cool of the evening. The impression that exercise, I mean reasonable exercise, should not be taken in warm climates, is merely a premium on liver disease. Idleness and inaction indeed, are baneful in warm climates as in cold.

Caeteris paribus, and speaking of intertropical Africa, the interior country is usually much more healthy than the coast, and the dry uplands than are the banks of rivers. Mules and horses, but especially mules, so far as they are procurable and will stand the climate, are desirable for draught and portage. In any case natives, especially Fishmen Krumen Mandingoes Jaloofs Fantees and others, men well inured to the climate, should be employed as bearers. The soldier, unless when actually engaged, should

have to carry little or nothing but a suit of loose white wool clothing, with pith helmet and puggrce drawn well over the nape of the neck, also a light umbrella, to be supplemented by warmer coverings and a cummerband, for evening and night wear, at the close of the march. If possible roofed in quarters, tents or improvised huts, should be provided. I have seen very good huts, indeed, made of a few posts or stakes driven into the ground and thatched with palm leaf, the sides being wattled. The natives are quite competent to erect them quickly. On no account ought anyone to lie on the ground, at least without the interposition of a guttapercha or indiarubber sheet and adequate covering. The natives also extemporize trestle beds, supplied with mats, very convenient and handy. No one otherwise, should sleep in the open, whether by night or by day.

The commissariat is of very great importance, and must be most carefully attended to. The black men are excellent cooks, but will be best superintended by European directors. I commend a mess of curry every day for the midday meal along with boiled rice and ship biscuit. Biscuit indeed, including every other eatable, as well as all articles of attire, should be conveyed in tin boxes. Rice, tea, biscuit, and coffee will be found desirable at morning and evening meals. Food supplies should be sparingly, but at the same time sufficiently, made use of. Coffee, roasted and ground, also tea sugar and other comforts, must be conveyed in tin canisters. The supply ought to be abundant. Maccaroni and cheese are very desirable, but must be kept in tin vessels. No drink should be taken on the march, but weak rum and water, or warm tea or coffee, may be drank with discretion at the close. No cold water whatever ought to be drank, weak tea coffee or soup, hot or cold, is infinitely preferable. Portable sheet iron cooking

stoves should be taken. Stoves heated with petroleum or spirit, are ready at a moments notice, whereas fire-wood is not always to hand in damp African forests. Stearine candles, petroleum or spirit lamps, with wax vestas, are all requisite. Ants are omnivorous eaters, therefore, everything that an ant or cockroach can devour, should be kept in tin canisters or tin vessels. A little smoking, at the end of the march, for those who smoke, is not inexpedient. The inner clothing must, or at least ought to be washed *daily*, hence a good supply of mercenaries will be requisite. The natives, men and women, beat soiled clothes with a stick, and otherwise wash and do up very speedily.

If possible, white men ought not to be employed as sentinels by night. By day, they might pace under an awning or covered way. In other respects, the night patrols should wear light cloaks, don their waist or cummerbands, smoke their cigar or pipe if they like, and preface their patrol duty by a warm cup of coffee. There ought further to be ambulatory hospitals and ambulances, in short, adequate means for conveying wounded and stricken men. Indisposition, which in Africa is very rapid, ought to be seen to without a moments avoidable delay. Black hospital orderlies and black nurses should also be provided. Although often very good and tender in their ways, I would earnestly urge that there should be a corps, if but a few, of English nurses in addition. Medicine chests need not be heavy, but they ought to be sheeted with tin. Each night and morning, while in Africa and for some time after leaving Africa, every white man, I submit, should swallow a dose of quinine, the amount to be at the discretion of the medical men, but say three or four grains in some convenient fluid. In case of cholera, *par hasard*, invading the camp, half a drachm of dilute sulphuric acid, of which a sufficient supply ought to be taken in small

glass stoppered viols, may be added to the quinine menstruum. This, or shortly, is the best period of the year, in fact the dry season, when the Harmattan winds blow for going to Africa and, with prudence care and caution, avoiding the exciting causes of disease, the men should have a fair time of it. Women, because more temperate, escape as a rule far better in warm climates than white men commonly do. The inference is obvious. But I have known individuals of both sexes who had spent years in Africa without once having experienced a headache. My older brother lived long years on the Coast, and I am now here to tell the tale. Ladies and gentlemen indeed have both assured me that they liked the climate and, as a whole, preferred Africa to every other country. The climate and country, with whatever serious drawbacks, have many and various amenities for those who take care, and turn them to reasonable account. The extinction of the bloody rule of Ashanti and, if it might be, the appointment of a European regent to that and, perhaps, other African States as well, would prove a clear gain to Africa and the world.

II.

Everything belonging to a soldier in Africa on the march, even to his shoes and umbrella, should be of a light hue. For white repels the burning ray, and so very simple and yet important an expedient as the adoption of white in dress, is one not to be neglected. Common knitted worsted hose, I mean as drawers and vest properly adjusted, would prove very expedient for outward wear. A change of inner garments, also a lighter pair of easy shoes, ought to be carried in order to put on when the daily tramp was over. A soldier crippled by bad shoes is a misery to himself, and unfit for his work. Shoes should be broad

soled, low heeled, roomy, straight inside, and longer than the foot. Mr. Dowey of London, is the proper person to furnish such shoes. But other makers would, doubtless, be found willing to supply them as well. A daily wash, once or twice, from head to foot, followed by a change of garments, is indispensable. It is not only refreshing in itself, but conducive to health and cleanliness as well. The notorious comparative immunity of officers from endemic disease shows the importance of placing the soldier, I speak of the rank and file, on a perfect footing in respect of the means and appliances of promoting health and self respect with his superiors. The Walcheren expedition included a magnificent and well appointed British army and yet, such was the disregard of sanitary precautions and of endemic influences, that never were troops more miserably decimated. It is on record, however, most pregnant fact, that the officers owing to their greater habitual caution and lesser exposure, enjoyed comparative immunity. I would therefore, intreat beg implore, if only my earnest voice can make itself heard, that the African campaign should finish before the lightning, the thunder, the mists, the tornadoes and the rains bring it perforce to a close. The rain indeed, comes down in bucketsful and no campaigner could withstand it.

The sergeants of companies should each, I think, carry a small supply of medicine for immediate use, say the aromatic spirit of ammonia laudanum and dilute sulphuric acid. It might also be desirable to have the ether spray apparatus of Dr. Richardson, the ether however, diluted with an equal part of alcohol, to suit the African climate. If, notwithstanding every precaution, men were stricken down with sunstroke or heat apoplexy cold appliances, the cold water douche or even the ether spray itself, to the head should be had immediate recourse to, the suf-

ferer however, being laid prone and out of the immediate rays of the sun until haply, consciousness were restored. Mosquitoes, particularly at night, are often most distressing and annoying, but a net drawn across the door and window openings would help to keep them at bay.

A single moments avoidable delay ought not to take place in dealing with the cruel and unscrupulous savages whom civilisation is now called upon to encounter. The dry season is of most brief duration, and it is quite impossible, for Europeans at any rate, to carry on military operations during the rains. A broad track, one at least a hundred feet wide, should be cleared for the advance of the troops. By setting a sufficient number of negro pioneer mercenaries to work, thousands at a time, and giving them every day sufficient start, not only might the bush be cleared almost as fast as the troops could march, but huts, and trestle bridges over the rivers, could be erected, fires lighted, baths and meals prepared. The implement mainly used for clearing purposes is a heavy cutlas or machete with wooden handle. It is constructed for the purpose, but is an excellent weapon as well. In stalwart hands, underwood, small trees, large ones it is not commonly needful to meddle with, herbs shrubs and creeping plants, disappear with marvellous rapidity. I speak of what I have witnessed, and I know the process to be feasible as it would prove desirable. In fact, the native paths, for many reasons, except at a pinch, are quite unsuited for transit. Working parties might be covered with light mountain howitzers or Gatling guns and the Martini Henri rifle as well. Electric lamps, a couple at least, could be lighted by night. For when the moon does not shine, the African night which comes on very suddenly, is often dark, and the very possibility of a surprise, whether by night or by day, must be avoided.

The soldier, in some respects, has to be treated as a child. He has to be thought for and acted for. His food drink clothing comforts and necessities, alike, require to be provided. He has to be shown what he ought to do, told what he ought not to do. Every possible means indeed, should be taken to prevent him from injuring himself, to keep him well when he is well, and to succour him when in distress. In Africa as in tropical climates generally, an immense and, in some respects, imperfectly understood change takes place in the animal economy in the persons of those who come from colder climates. The lungs, on which hitherto has almost exclusively devolved the task of depurating the blood from carbonaceous foulness have now, in part at least, to yield in this respect to the liver, and any imprudence in diet or regimen only tends to embarrass the process in question, and conduct it to dangerous if not fatal, issues. Some individuals become acclimated without risk or danger while others, and that sadly too often, incur the extremity of both. In dealing with Ashanti not a moment, I would say, is to be lost. A very few weeks indeed, should see the contest to its close. Instant, yes instant action is imperatively called for. And, if I have ventured to put pen to paper it is that I might contribute my mite to save brave men from perishing like flies, as I have seen them perish in days gone by.

III.

The last idea that seems to enter into the mind of an average Englishman or Englishwoman is to eat and drink less than what the appetite prompts. Nothing however, is more certain than that eating and drinking considerably less than what appetite prompts, are greatly conducive to the pleasant and

effective working of the organism, its immunity from disease and suffering, and the prolongation of life. This is true of Europe, but it is vastly true of Africa. The Englishmen, soldiers sailors and civilians, who go to Africa, mostly robust adults, are freighted with a mass of blood often much greater than their actual requirements. The consequence is that when disease, especially fever ensues, the action and reaction of the heart and arteries become violent in the extreme, the cutaneous transpiration is arrested, the blood rushes to the vital centres, in short, the derangement of function is so immediate and excessive as in newcomers, to terminate existence within, perhaps, a few hours. Thus it is, that ships have been left without possibly a soul on board, or with greatly diminished crews. The British sailor, for the most part, is the best fed man in the world. He eats fleshmeat three, nay four times a day. His allowance of grog, at least in ships of war, is twice or three times as great as it ought to be. He reaches a port, we shall say in Africa. There is probably no awning. He sleeps in the close and crowded forecabin. His allowance, both of meat and drink, is consumed undiminished. He pulls and hauls and drives beneath a fervid sun. He goes ashore, falls into the hands of the harpies who lie in wait for him, drinks to excess, I have seen him lying senseless in the streets, contracts fever, and too often perishes. Our carpenter, I can recall as if it were but yesterday his innocent florid cheeks his light blue eyes and flaxen hair, as he passed me smiling with his fellows. On that very day he fevered, grew rapidly worse and perished. I went to see him both when he was ill and when he was dead. All traces of suffering had disappeared, and he lay like one who slept calmly and well. Soldiers and sailors, I submit, should be well looked to both before and after they reach land. I would have licensed

houses of entertainment at all our ports, with regulated charges and fare, placed exclusively in the hands of respectable, responsible people.

The doctrine and the practice of medicine, for well nigh two thousand years, have decided with tolerably unanimity that fever should, in general, at the onset, be treated with more or less depletion. Bleeding indeed will not remove the terrible reaction attendant on African fever, but a dozen or twenty ounces taken from the arm of a new arrival, some full blooded robust European, will help to abate that reaction, and to keep it in bounds compatible with life. There cannot be a question about the propriety of clearing out, with some simple and sufficiently active aperient, the long tract of the intestinal canal. Sometimes, this being premised, a smart emetic will at once check the further progress of the fever. If not, I would administer quinine in twenty grain doses, preferably during the remission, if haply a remission of the fever ensue. The hair should be cut or shaved, cold applications applied to the head, and a sheet wrung out of cold water to the body generally. The air too must be most carefully renewed, and the insatiate thirst properly appeased. When I had the fever myself, I found cut limes or lemons, rubbed over the temples most refreshing. Their grateful perfume always reminds me of Africa. Generally the fever abates, when it does abate, almost as rapidly as it began. But sometimes remissions lead inexperienced persons to imagine, too often most erroneously, that the fever has departed altogether. The utmost prudence, therefore, must for some time be exercised, since an ounce of solid food, premature effort, any incaution in fine, may cost a life. Relapses, too, are not unfrequent. In short, the convalescence, when convalescence haply ensues, has to be as carefully watched and directed as the fever itself.

Occasionally the fever runs a more protracted course, and then the sufferer sinks into a condition of excessive prostration. In no case, however, must watchfulness be omitted or hope given up at least while life endures. It is hardly necessary to observe that in cases like these, due warmth must be maintained, and such sustenance and stimuli had recourse to as shall prove at once most judicious practicable and expedient. The use of the cummerband or waist-belt and the careful avoidance of evening and night chills, will prove great preservatives against dysentery. As for the actual treatment of dysentery, the same general rules, at least during the inflammatory period, subsist as with regard to fever itself. Otherwise, the invaluable aid of topical warm moist applications, along with opium and ipecacuanha internally, is now too well appreciated to need much insisting upon.

After all, however successful we may prove in the treatment and management of disease, the greatest benefit will accrue from preventing it altogether. No stone, in fact, must be left unturned, to compass so desirable a result. And I am intimately assured that with care and caution, more might be done in this respect than has ever yet been achieved.

Tents, in my opinion, Africa being in question, are not nearly so desirable as improvised huts. Tents are hot and narrow, as well as cumbrous to convey, whereas the improvised hut is at once comparatively cool and roomy, while materials for construction are everywhere to hand. They can be built as it were at once, and also strong enough to resist any casual blast, with three walls reaching to the roof, and the fourth and front wall short of it by two or three feet as in houses in the Brazils, a veranda extending over an open piazza, also in front and supported by posts. The doors and windows, or other apertures, may be covered with removable gauze or network, so as to

keep out insects. Such structure or structures, some for sleeping in others to serve as refectories, shielding at once from nightly dew and the suns fierce rays by day, comparatively cool roomy and airy, could be set up in ranges almost as quickly as tents, and further provided with trestle bed table and stool, likewise calabashes for water. There is now beside me a light ashen trestle bed, which also converts into an easy chair, stretched with canvas, constructed at St. Malo in France, the woods at the points of junction being let into each other by slots. One man could easily carry two or three of them, and a small trestle table and chair as well. With a leaf awning above, and pole on each side, they would serve admirably as ambulances for sick or wounded men, who could not well be left behind or otherwise safely disposed of. Kumasi with such furtherances, might, I think, be safely reached in marching order within a fortnight or three weeks from the sea, and any opposition effectively put down. I hope however, when the place is within hail, that it may be assailed and, if needs must, destroyed from a distance, and valuable lives subjected to none of the risks of an assault.*

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF AFRICA

One advantage of travel is that it rouses the perceptions, makes one so to speak free of this beautiful world. The land we live in, the country of our birth, is just as marvellous, just as striking, as is any foreign shore, but habit too much dulls the faculty of observation, renders us blind to objects which, were they seen for the first time and from another point of view, would doubtless affect us with equal wonder and admiration. The eye in truth needs to be cultured by the understanding and the heart. Few things indeed are more entrancing than is the aspect of the

* Itinerary to Kumasi. Wyld, Charing Cross.

vast tumultuous deep when first seen from the little area of a ship at sea. For it is contrast with the land that makes the ocean seem infinite. The immense abyss, the mighty forces which surround us, the as yet unfamiliar objects, all assail us with surprise and wonder. When actually at sea, and the newness has worn off, the horizon seems to contract around, we move as in a charmed circle, and that which at the beginning was so novel, comes at last to wear the aspect of a sublime monotony.

THE TROPICS.

The changes however, which beset us when we advance amid vast tracts of ocean, develop new sensations with the reflections consequent upon them. Sailors for the most part, see the world from the very outside. Engaged each moment as they are with a fresh succession of phenomena to be battled or borne with, they look not beyond the immediate surface. So far at least as my own experience extended, there was plenty to engage attention. First, were the gentle trade winds wafting one ever and ever onward, with changeless sail, leading into one knew not well what fresh regions of wonder and enchantment. Each day almost there was some new creature, bonito it might be, or albacore, porpoise flying fish dolphin or mighty whale. Birds of beautiful plumage flung their tireless pinions over the deep. One day I recollect, it had been almost calm, and a lovely flitting creature was shot by one among us, and its harmless career brought for ever to a close. The maimed bird sitting proudly on the heaving water was borne away, whereupon a Swedish sailor throwing off his jacket, plunged after it into the sea, and in a very little, for the ship was drifting, floated full two miles away. He got the bird indeed, but

would himself have been lost, had not a four oared boat been sent to bring him in. The poor captive resented the savage hospitality we had shown it, and sat with head erect, till its bright eyes were glazed in death. A little after this we were startled by the apparition of an armed brig, bristling with cannon and swarming with swarthy men, that chased us for a day. Our two poor pieces of artillery were cast loose for the others, along with some hundred or more barrels of powder, were in the hold. Guns pistols and blunderbusses were quickly counted out, cannon ball and improvised cartridges placed to hand, for there were those on board, thirty stalwart men, to whom fighting was not new, my excellent brother among the rest, who said no pirate should ever master them. In a little the stranger, all resplendent in copper sheathing and bounding through the deep like a living thing, ranged alongside, and simply telling us on being asked that she was the Boxer ship of war of some South American State, put up her helm and glided fast and far away.

Among Gods wonders on the unstable sea are what we term flying fish. They are about the size of herrings, and when a flight of them, all dripping with spray and glittering in the sun, shoot like arrows from the deep and fall, some on deck but mostly hurtling back into their native wave, there are few things more beautiful. But of all the entrancing sights to be witnessed within the tropics, commend me to the morning and more especially the setting sun. Towers then there are, spires and palaces of gold, that seem the image and embodiment of Heaven, very gardens of the Hesperids, cherubim and seraphim azure pinioned floating peacefully along, then vanishing slowly away. The afterglow indeed, the simple reflection in the opposite hemisphere, often exceeds by far the paler lustre of our more northern sun. But